

FedEx to test 'SameDay Bot' for local deliveries (Update)

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Global courier service FedEx on Wednesday announced plans to test a "SameDay Bot" autonomous delivery device designed to carry purchases from retail shops to local customers.

FedEx said its robotic delivery carts, reminiscent of a large canister with wheels, will be tried out in its home city of Memphis, Tennessee later this year, provided it gets final approval from officials there.

"The bot represents a milestone in our ongoing mission to solve the complexities and expense of same-day, last-mile delivery for the growing e-commerce market in a manner that is safe and environmentally friendly," FedEx executive vice president Brie Carere said in a statement.

FedEx enlisted DEKA Development & Research to help develop the delivery bot, which is designed to travel along sidewalks or roadsides carrying small shipments to homes or businesses.

"The bot has unique capabilities that make it unlike other autonomous vehicles," said DEKA founder Dean Kamen, an engineer whose creations include the Segway.

Battery-powered FedEx bots have sensors to avoid pedestrians and other potential obstacles, and can even climb steps or curbs, according to the companies. The bot's top speed was reported to be 10 miles per hour (16 kilometers per hour).

The initial test will involve deliveries between selected FedEx offices.

FedEx said that it is exploring the potential of using the bots to meet short-range delivery needs of retailers including Walmart, Target and Pizza Hut.

It is common for people to live within three miles of retail shops where they are customers, creating an opportunity to serve them with "hyper-local," on-demand deliveries, according to FedEx.

An array of startups have been working on efficient, autonomous robots to carry purchases that "last mile" from restaurants, shops, or warehouses.

E-commerce giant Amazon in January began putting cooler-sized robots to work delivering packages to customers in a neighborhood outside Seattle.

Electric-powered, wheeled delivery vehicles named "Scout" were created by Amazon and guide themselves along sidewalks at a walking pace, according to Sean Scott, the vice president heading the project.

Results of the Scout experiment will determine whether the system is expanded.

Amazon has developed an extensive logistics network as it works to efficiently delivery goods to customers while controlling costs.

Chinese retail giant JD.com uses delivery robots, as do a number of startups operating in the United States and Europe.

Starship Technologies, based in Estonia, has tested operation in the US capital city of Washington, and another startup, KiwiBot, handles

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